

Lifelong Artistry: Crafts in the Daily Lives of Tribals of Jhadol, Udaipur

Neetu Kunwar Jodha

*SNDT Women's University, PhD JRF Student,
Department of Drawing and Painting, Karve Road, Pune, Maharashtra*

Abstract: The main objective of the paper is to explore the hidden art and craft in the daily lives of the Garasia and Bhil tribe of Jhadol. Various villages were visited in Jhadol of Udaipur District, local residents were interacted with, and surveys were conducted to discover skilled artisans. Their unique artistry was become acquainted with, where crafted items are effortlessly created during their leisure time without any premeditated designs or plans. It was observed that these items are easily incorporated into their daily lives as practical tools. Interestingly, nonfunctional crafted decorative items were not come across in their homes. Traditions and beliefs are integral to the lives of the tribal people, and many crafts are a living part of these traditions, such as memorial stones (hura) and masks, which will be further discussed in this paper. Beyond this, exploration revealed the pervasive use of bamboo and wood in their architectural designs and everyday objects, showcasing a deep connection between their craft and the practical aspects of their lives.

Keywords: bamboo, craft, Garasia, tribe, tradition

1. Introduction

The villages of Jhadol, a remote area in Udaipur, Rajasthan, where the tribal communities navigate the challenges of a capital-centric world, where they strive for their livelihoods, a healthy lifestyle, and respect. These communities lead modest lives, facing economic hardships evident in their humble dwellings made of mud. Research on well-known crafts has already been conducted in the Udaipur area, such as Kavad, Pichhwai painting, Thewa jewellery, bone inlay art and leatherwork. However, little attention has been given to the beautiful crafts and traditions happening in the marginalized areas around Udaipur (Ranjan 2005:118).

This research is focused on the crafts of Garasia and Bhil tribes of Jhadol. among the scheduled Tribes of Rajasthan, Garasia stands third in terms of its numerical strength. Primarily centered in Udaipur, Sirohi, and Pali districts of Rajasthan, the Garasias inhabit the hilly and forested expanse of the Aravali hills (Singh Mann 1989:73). The dialect, spoken by Garasia is popularly known as Girasia or Nyar. There are many similarities between the Garasia and Bhil tribes. As the two tribes inhabit adjacent and similar surroundings, they share many commonalities, including dress, food, family patterns, settlement patterns, and the nature and design of their huts, making them appear almost identical (Singh Mann 1989:79). under the survey, direct interactions were conducted with individuals, and information about their crafts was gathered through question-answer sessions. Discussions were held regarding the usage of their crafts and the availability of materials for crafting.

2. Research Methodology

Through this research, there is an approach to identify artisans in various villages of Jhadol, who are engaged in woodcraft. The objective is to offer them an opportunity to display their artistic expertise on a public platform. This opportunity will be facilitated through an upcoming workshop arranged by Udaipur TRI (Tribal Research Institute). The workshop, coordinated by Udaipur TRI, serves as a platform where tribal artists from marginalized villages are uplifted, and they are given the chance to present and receive recognition for their creativity.

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach. The primary aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of the woodcraft artisan community in the specified area.

2.1 Data Collection

Participants: The study focused on woodcraft artisans in over 10 villages in the Jhadol region.

Survey Method: Data was gathered over a three-day period using a combination of interviews and open-ended questionnaires.

Interviews: In-person interviews with skilled artisans aimed to capture rich qualitative insights into their craft, experiences, and challenges.

3. Villages of Jhadol

Villages such as Chatiya Kheri, Sameeja, Oгна, Mor Magara, Galdar, and Gejavi were explored. During the visit, Bhim Raj Garasia, a local mediator, accompanied, facilitating interactions, and organizing a meeting with local artisans and craftsmen. A visit to the home of one of these artisans provided the opportunity to witness the craftsmanship of wooden ploughs for farming. Observing their skilled work, note was also taken of the traditional architecture of their houses, constructed with mud walls and clay tiles on the roofs [F-1].



Figure 1: Mud house of Garasia

4. Crafts in daily life

Among the noteworthy items, there was a distinctive chicken enclosure known as "Pohra" [F-2]. Crafted from bamboo, this structure served as a protective barrier against predators. The craftsmanship was remarkable, displaying a simple yet well-thought-out design. Bamboo played a crucial role in their daily lives, finding application in various creations such as doors, tools, utensils, and more.



Figure 2: Chicken Cage (Pohra)

The community utilizes bamboo for crafting various small items, incorporating it into their daily lives. Examples include the "korka," designed to be worn on the mouths of oxen, and the crafting of "waad" (bamboo blinds) [F-3].



Figure 3: Korka

"Chaach Ravai" is a bamboo tool specifically crafted for the purpose of churning and preparing ghee, makhan (butter), chaas (buttermilk), and dahi (yogurt) shown in [F-4]. This tool is employed by rolling it in milk, a daily practice undertaken each morning to produce various dairy products.

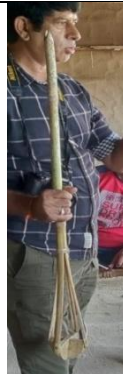


Figure 4: Chhach Ravai

Bamboo grain containers, or "dhan ki kothi," are traditionally coated with clay to serve as effective storage units for grains. Beyond their functional use, these containers also become canvases for artistic expression, as people often adorn them with drawings and paintings using homemade colors as [F – 5]. Moreover, bamboo finds versatile applications in the creation of weapons such as bows and arrows, essential tools for both hunting and protection [F – 6]. This showcases the resourcefulness of the community in utilizing bamboo not only for practical necessities like grain storage but also for crafting items vital to their daily lives and safety.



Figure 5: Dhan ki Kothi



Figure 6: Arrow and Bow

5. Architecture

In the heart of the tribal village, one can witness not only the resilience of its people but also the embodiment of simplicity, representing their timeless way of life. The homes, stand as humble testaments to the community's dedication to hard work and creativity. These dwellings showcase a unique blend of tradition and resourcefulness, constructed with locally sourced materials like mud and bamboo. The simplicity in their architecture is a reflection of the enduring spirit of the residents, embracing a lifestyle deeply rooted in the values of community, hard work, and creativity. Each home tells a story of the people's connection to the land, their unwavering dedication to sustainable living, and the artistic touches that adorn their living spaces. In the midst of these abodes, one can catch a glimpse of the cultural richness and the enduring spirit that defines the essence of tribal life.



Figure 7: Mud house and carved pillars



Figure 8: Bamboo Doors

6. Crafts in Traditions

Tribal traditions are deeply ingrained in the lives of the people, with various crafts serving as tangible expressions of these enduring customs. These crafts, handed down through generations, embody the essence of the tribe's identity, fostering a strong sense of belonging and shared heritage. As the tribal people engage in the artistry of their crafts, they not only preserve their traditions but also forge a profound connection with the cultural dimensions of their community.

6.1 Masks

The Garasiya community incorporates masks into their Gavri dance performances, creating distinct ones for various characters based on the day and play. Local artisans skillfully carve these wooden masks, depicting goddess avatars, gods, demons, historical figures, sacred animals, corrupt officials, and more. The consistent figure in these dramas is the Budia character, the master of ceremonies, adding stability to the dynamic performances. Budia, embodying a potent fusion of Shaivite and demonic energies, holds a crucial protective role in Gavari traditions. These masks are not confined to Gavri dances alone; they also feature prominently in marriages and other events. Crafted with goat hair affixed using rice starch, these masks exemplify the community's rich artistic traditions and cultural expressions.



Figure 9: Mask Creator



Figure 10: Mask

6.2 Hura (Memorial Stone)

The erected stones known as "Hura," predominantly found in Gujarat and Rajasthan, crafted as memorials for families and warriors. The visible portion of these memorial stones is approximately two feet wide and three feet in height, with the lower section buried up to ten feet in the ground. Typically carved from sandstone due to its ease of carving, these stones are sometimes placed on pavilions, and on rare occasions, a

shrine or cenotaph (Chhatri) known as "deri" is constructed over them, particularly for royal families. These memorials are revered by the community or the descendants of the person, especially on significant occasions like the individual's death anniversary, event milestones, festivals, and auspicious days in the month of Kartika. Rituals involve washing the memorials with milk and water, along with the application of sindoor or kumkum, and the scattering of flowers. Communities have also started tagging names and dates on these memorial stones. Memorial stones are referred to by different names in various locations. In Rajasthan, they are known as "Hura," in Gujarat as "Paliya," in Karnataka, as "Kalla," and in Maharashtra, they are called "Veergal" (Kulkarni 2018:121). This tradition is prevalent in various locations across Gujarat, where memorial stones are often crafted in abundance. In some places, such as Nizar Taluka in Gujarat, these memorial stones (khambha) are made of wood (Fischer 2021: 273).

Observing the contrast between the older and contemporary memorial stones, it is evident how the stylistic depiction of figures has evolved over time. Early stones feature half-circled top borders, transitioning to triangular shapes in later ones. The introduction of oil paint is notable in the newer stones, influencing the depiction of clothing and activities. While older stones often portray figures with bows and arrows, newer ones typically omit these elements and are covered with clothing. Despite these changes, the overall structure and backdrop of the memorials remain consistent.



Figure 11: Old memorial stone



Figure 12: New memorial stone



Figure 13: Old memorial stone



Figure 14: New memorial stone

7. Wall Paintings

Tribal people decorate their homes' courtyards and walls on festivals and some other occasions using locally available paints like geru and chuna. The designs predominantly feature floral and geometric patterns, characterized by simplified forms and bold outlines.



Figure 15: Painted mud wall

There was a house adorned with a painting by the talented artist Dilip Kumar, who holds a B.A. in drawing and painting from Udaipur University. Witnessing his work, one would believe the younger generation is poised to showcase such art in the market, deserving recognition and appreciation for their talents. Dilip Kumar, having studied in the city, returned to his village, continuing his artistic endeavors. The stylistic figures in his paintings depict folk tales and everyday life, drawing inspiration from the animals seen in the ancestral wall paintings. The artist takes the initiative to embellish the village walls, as evident in the photo, capturing scenes like a woman rolling a stone to grind grains. The grain container is intricately decorated with lines and depictions of animals, portraying elements from daily life such as rats, buffaloes, cows, birds, and more.



Figure 16: Wall painting



Figure 17: Wall painting

Observation

Researcher accompanied the Udaipur Tribal Research Institute (T.R.I.) team to a tribal village in Udaipur, discovering that even a small initiative can significantly impact the lives of the residents. Witnessing their struggles, it became evident that a little support can bring light into their challenging existence. It was observed how societal and political forces often marginalize and render them invisible across various sectors, with attention only fleeting their way during elections. The crafts of these tribes lack the recognition they deserve in the market, with only a handful gaining popularity while others remain in the shadows. The objective is to bring to light the enchanting world of tribal craft and art that still resides in darkness. Through studying their creations, the aim is to comprehend their circumstances and life perspectives. It is hoped that these tribes will one day attain equal rights, wealth, and the respect they rightfully deserve in society.

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Author Profile



Neetu Kunwar Jodha received the B.F.A and M.F.A from University of Rajasthan in 2017 and 2020 respectively. Presently she is pursuing her PhD (JRF) from SNDT Women's University, Pune.